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COMPANY ACCUSED OF POLLUTING WATERWAY REPORT SAYS SUNOL QUARRY FIRM EXCEEDED SAFE LIMITS AT LEAST 16 TIMES IN 2000 OPPONENTS HOPE S.F. OFFICIALS WILL RESCIND LEASE

Peter Felsenfeld, Times Staff Writer

SUNOL Mission Valley Rock Co. dumped polluted water into Alameda Creek at levels exceeding safe limits at least 16 times in 2000, according to company records filed with the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Mission Valley operates a gravel quarry on San Francisco Water Department land south of Interstate 680 in Sunol. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors recently approved a lease allowing the company to mine an additional 242 acres near Sunol's downtown.

Although San Francisco officials of the Public Utilities Commission have characterized Mission Valley's expansion lease approved by the Board of Supervisors in November 2000 as a done deal, newly elected San Francisco Supervisor Chris Daly has drafted a resolution urging the water department "to discontinue its plans to develop a quarry on the site."

Sunol residents opposed to the quarry hope Mission Valley's discharge violations will prompt San Francisco officials to rescind the lease.

"We find it astounding that the supervisors and the PUC would reward a company with all these apparent violations," said Pat Stillman, president of Save Our Sunol. "We feel it is an obvious misuse of the public trust."

The Public Utilities and Deregulation Committee, chaired by Daly, will vote on the resolution Wednesday, as a preliminary step before the full board considers the document.

The quarry's discharge permit assigns federally approved standards regulating pH levels, turbidity (water cloudiness), chlorides (salts) and solids in stream-water samples. Companies monitor their own plants and submit monthly reports and an annual review.

Mission Valley's violations range from minor to extreme. For example, daily water turbidity level may not exceed 40 NTU, or nephelometric turbidity units. On March 1, the company reported 740 NTU and March 8, 250 NTU.

Also in March, the company reported its "settleable solid" level measuring materials that slip through the treatment process at 17.5 times the allowable standard. In May and June, Mission Valley listed four separate pH violations.

Representatives from Mission Valley did not return several calls Friday.

The water quality board was unable to locate monthly reports for April, July or August.

Jeff Miller, director of the **Alameda Creek Alliance**, said high pH levels can clog fish gills and smother the eggs of amphibians and fish.

"There's a reason these standards have been set," Miller said. "If everyone is violating their discharge permits, we're not going to have clean water; it's not going to happen."

After the water passes Mission Valley's facility, it is diverted into the ground basin that provides drinking water for Fremont, Newark and Union City.

Will Bruhns, a senior engineer with the water quality control board, said 98 percent of the data the board examines is provided by the companies being regulated. Once a year, inspectors conduct surprise spot checks.

"We've been doing it this way for 50 years, and we have a pretty good track record," Bruhns said. "The vast majority of our spot checks have no problem."

Although Bruhns couldn't comment on Mission Valley's case specifically, he said state law mandates penalties for companies with discharge violations. In addition, companies are required to list all violations on a cover letter submitted under penalty of perjury.

Mission Valley did not report at least four reported violations on its recent cover letter, signed by W.M. Calvert, the company's chief engineer.